CONFERENCE OF THE COMMITTEE ON DISARMAMENT

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Statement made by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, The Rt. Hon. Harold Wilson, M.P., at Lancaster House, London, on 5 March 1970, on the occasion of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

Some eighteen months ago, when the Non-Proliferation Treaty was opened for signature in Moscow, in Washington and in London, I described this treaty as the most important measure of arms control and disarmament on which agreement had yet been reached. At that historic moment we set the seal of success on nearly seven years of negotiations. Our signatures were a token of our confidence that the community of nations would agree that this was the road of wisdom.

There have been some who doubted whether there would ever be enough support to bring the treaty into force. Whenever any great endeavour is set afoot there are always doubters. In this case there may have been more than usual because the treaty needed ratification by forty-three states, about a third of the international community.

Over the months we have watched as the number of signatures and ratifications of the treaty steadily mounted; Britain ratified the treaty in the autumn of 1968. Today we have witnessed the culmination of the process, the deposit of sufficient instruments of ratification to bring the treaty into force. This ceremony, in which the distinguished representatives of our fellow depositary governments, the Ambassadors of the Soviet Union and the United States, are taking part, therefore constitutes a momentous step. It is being matched today by similar ceremonies in Moscow and Washington which are being attended by Chairman Kosygin and President Nixon.

But in our pleasure in reaching this historic milestone, let us recognize that much still remains to be done. We know that there are two forms of proliferation, vertical as well as horizontal. The countries which do not possess nuclear weapons and which are now undertaking an obligation never to possess them, have the right to expect that the nuclear weapon states will fulfil their part of the bargain. We are confident that the American and Russian negotiators will bear this obligation in mind

when they get down again next month to the complex discussions on the limitation of strategic arms, which may well themselves in turn prove the most important arms control negotiations undertaken since the last world war.

Let us remember that, although the Non-Proliferation Treaty comes into force today, there are still a number of states which have not yet adhered to the treaty. We hope that these ceremonies in the capitals of the three depositary governments will encourage those states to overcome their present hesitations and to recognise that this treaty offers to them individually and to mankind in general the best hope of avoiding nuclear war.

Finally I should like to pay on behalf of all of us a tribute to the dedicated teamwork which has brought us to this point. I am thinking particularly of the distinguished members of the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee in Geneva who worked with dedication and courage for so many years to lay the foundation for this treaty, and as I am speaking in London may I specially mention our own Ministers for Disarmament over this period, Lord Chalfont and Mr. Mulley. The work of this Committee shows us how goodwill and commonsense and statesmanship can triumph, whatever the political differences that separate the nations. This is perhaps the most significant and encouraging aspect of all, and augurs well for international relations in the nineteenseventies.

This is a historic occasion. It is not an end but a beginning. Now the challenge to humanity is what we can do to build on the achievement we are celebrating today.